

DESPOTISM VS. DEMOCRACY IN THE MENA REGION

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Abstract

Since its birth on the planet Earth, man has incessantly embarked on a long journey in search of its “being”. He formed tribal clans, fought endless series of wars in search of wealth and power. He attempted to discover, understand and subdue the universe to its limited mind. His imagination created then herds of good and bad gods to hide his weaknesses, fears and limitations. Often, he proclaimed himself divine and godly, when, in reality he lives in fear and anxiety facing death and threats by unseen killer bacteria or natural elements that impacted and reduced his pride, arrogance, and self-worship to ultimate death. Glory, wealth, power, and physical well being soon evaporated into some dark and narrow dungeon. This self-proclaimed superman-woman, who defies all laws and rules, keep dreaming about being eternal, while reality transforms them sometimes into weak, empty and helpless vegetables. Their worlds of violence, threats and greed continually collapsed for no return. This research focuses upon this self-proclaimed “superhuman” of the Middle East, who lives and dies in a state of slavery not imposed upon him by force, rather a result of personal consent. The authors aim to clarify the paradigm of relationship between despotism and consent.

Keywords: Espotism, indoctrination, violence, freedom, democracy, consent, culture

Introduction

“Oriental despotism is based not on force, but on consent. Hence, fear cannot be said to be its motive force, instead the power of the despot master feeds upon the servile nature of those enslaved.” (Aristotles)

In search of the meaning of existence the human kind lived in search of the essence of being in a continuous way from the time of creation. “Man” created clannish tribes, went into conquest and never-ending cycles of combats and hostilities in search of possessions and control. He attempted to discover, understand and subdue the universe to its limited mind. His imagination created then herds of good and bad gods to hide his weaknesses, fears and limitations. Often, he proclaimed himself divine and godly, when, in reality he lives in fear and anxiety facing death and threats by unseen killer bacteria or natural elements that impacted and reduced his pride, arrogance, and self-worship to ultimate death. Glory, wealth, power, and physical well being soon evaporated into some dark and narrow dungeon. This self-proclaimed superman-woman, who defies all laws and rules, keep dreaming about being eternal, while reality transforms them sometimes into weak, empty and helpless vegetables. Their worlds of violence, threats and greed continually collapsed for no return.

This research focuses upon this self-proclaimed “superhuman” of the Middle East, who lives and dies in a state of slavery not imposed upon him by force, rather a result of personal consent. The authors aim to clarify the paradigm of relationship between despotism and consent.

The main irony in such research lies in the fact that consent, by itself, is an essential pillar of any free and democratic system or regime. How could then an individual be subjected to slavery through consent, while simultaneously remaining free and democratic? To answer this seemingly contradicting question, clarifications are needed about the socio-economic-religious and political environment in which the Middle Eastern “being” was born, raised, live and die.

I.

Specificities of the Middle Eastern region

This region has, historically, been the creator of successive civilizations, religions and political trends. Conquerors followed by conquerors occupied it, established power in many forms starting with tribalism to princedoms, kingdoms, sultanates and republics. Many of these systems collapsed and whither away until modernity espoused the concepts of republics, popular sovereignty, democracy and nationalism. The major specificities that consequently characterize the MENA region revolve around (a) religious teaching and practices leading to cross-cultural conflicts; (b) monotheistic ideologies opposing secular ones; (c) indoctrination and brainwashing of the individual since birth; (d) glorification of violence and warfare as “holy” in most circumstances, instead of promoting the culture of tolerance, equity and peace.

Religious teaching and control

The MENA region has given birth to three interrelated monotheistic religions as is evident in their teachings, and in some dogmatic matters such as the Ten Commandments. Judaism was the founding basis, spiritually elevated by Christianity and humanly materialized by Islam. All these religions proclaim for fundamentals, “peace”, yet, they have constantly been glorifying wars and violence as the virtues, satisfying god’s will on earth and the glorified life after death.

Islam spread out as the religion based on the ultimate conquests leading to a majority of 94% of the inhabitants facing 6% minorities spread in Egypt, Syria and Lebanon.

Although the purpose of this research is to correlate Socrates’ statement to the socio-economic and political reality in the MENA region, one must clearly and objectively identify the religious forces that have been, for thousands of years, putting in chains of slavery the human inhabitants of the region.

Monotheistic ideologies

Since political, social, economic and military powers are centered and dependent on one force, named “god” whom some humans claim to represent, and defend his interests on earth. Consequently the logical powers of this perfect and omnipotent “god” are transplanted into a mortal and miserable human being, who then auto-hypnotes himself into divinity claiming possession of absolute divine powers regardless of any factors that might affect this self-worship and illusionary divinity. The results of such an environment ruled by misconception, illusion, arrogance and unlimited illiteracy, religious leaders assume, ipso facto, all powers including those related to politics, laws and warfare, under the concept “Al-Fakih’s rule” or the Caliph’s rule.

The MENA inhabitants have become unable to investigate nor question the legitimate authority of their religious leadership, as a result they literally adopt their instruction and teachings, fully convinced of some promised virtual rewards they will collect after death, mainly translated into unlimited physical happiness based on unlimited food and sex. This type of religious dominant power led to the ultimate consensus by the human subjects. The logical explanation of the phenomenon lies in the fact that the leader-despot, acts as the legitimate representative and caretaker of god’s interests on earth. The fear from

tyranny was astutely muted to divine obedience through consensus. The scientific factors in education that should question these mandatory imposed values, attributes and behaviors are non-existent. Children are often taught from their childhood the hardliners of religious principles and dogmas often translated in the development of stereotypes, biases and discriminations, all of which, are beefed by fundamentalism and violence against minorities.

In schools and universities the educational system and academic material often tend to widen the schism between citizens due to these stereotypes, leading often to physical clashes and injuries. The absence of academic programs promoting the culture of peace and partnership is flagrant and pitiful. Every socio-political group forms its local security power and attempts to impose it upon others quoting an abysmal justification of serving “god” or defending god’s rights and well-being. It is indeed absurd to believe that a mortal human individual or a group have been commissioned by god to act as caretakers of his ‘interests and rights on earth. The ultimate consequence of such heresies engages as people into “holy wars” claiming holy fictitious victories at the cost of trampling human rights, freedoms and democratic principles. The irony in this situation is that the masses do embrace with consent and emotional belligerence the norms and policies dictated by religious despots.

The educational system at various levels

Children are raised in families fully indoctrinated by their rulers-coaches. They are trained into a consensual obedience, for their daily behavior is cheeked and controlled; outlining what is right and wrong. They are made to believe being the military guardians and armies of god’s reign on earth. The concepts of human rights, freedom of questioning even searching for the different sides of the truth. What is imposed constitutes “the truth”, any deviation would be viewed as blasphemy, and punishable by death ordered by the “master” (religious leaders) who issues the verdict. To be pious, good and faithful to god, one is not allowed to ask, but blindly obey the divine leaders when called upon to perform violent acts, and kill the innocents to avenge the whims of the “man-god”. These educational trends and practices explain why, for example, political leaders, when it comes to elections do not allow any opposition, controlling 99.9 of the electoral votes. It is indeed in this case despotism by consent not fear. The ultimate result ends having “leaders” who remain in power for life often extending beyond 30 to 40 years. The striking tragedy in this situation is the absence of any possible evolution, or introduction of changes to ameliorate these primitive human living conditions.

The inhabitants of the MENA-Arab regions so far have failed to understand the real meaning of the concept of freedom and the sacred right to choose one’s destiny. This stagnant state of matters would also explain why women would not rise in masses asking for their basic rights? The people have great difficulties understanding the meaning and value of freedom. Instead, human freedoms are viewed as the threat to their culture, identity and existence; consequently, they choose as duties to fight freedom willingly and accept despotism. It is evident why the United States and Europe are considered as the “Great Satan” and threat to this prehistoric-medieval and despotic world.

Glorification of violence and warfare

In schools, families, within political parties and even when religious rituals are performed, the leaders are fully aware of their despotic powers and their power to inflame the emotional slavery of the masses. They master the art of brainwashing, deceit and concealment; they know how to induce eruption of the human primitive and instinctive emotions. Millions of followers would then shout in response to a leader’s speech filled with false and empty promises: “with our blood and lives we defend you”; “death to the American Satan”; or “kill the Zionist traitors”, in addition to an endless list of slogans generated from

hatred, vengeance, fundamental beliefs and others. The masses are mobilized, the innocent minority is victimized and abused lacking protection and security. Few examples would illustrate this problematic.

When in 2010 a Danish paper published some caricatures about Prophet Mohammad, the masses in Lebanon protested and invaded the streets in Ashrafiyeh, a Christian quarter in Beirut, burning tires and cars, looting stores and causing other destructions. The questions to be raised are: why destroy Ashrafiyeh in Lebanon a quarter inhabited by innocent compatriots? How such a primitive violent action benefits the Prophet Mohammad or anyone else whether in this or the other life? Wouldn't be better and more productive to act in civilized and peaceful manners through dialogues?

The examples to such primitive behaviors are too many to cite or count. The motives behind the predominance of such tribal behaviors are simple and easy to remedy once the people of the MENA region choose to become extrovert and open, cultured in human rights and basic freedoms that are granted to man by his creator the real "God" not by Mr. X or Z or another human pigmy.

The MENA region is urgently in need to produce free and cultured leaders operating under the umbrella of lawfulness, love and peace.

Human freedom and democracy

Following WWI and the creation of the League of Nations, muted in 1945 to the United Nations, the concepts of peoples' self-determination and respect for human rights became a basic pillars of international law, relations between sovereign states and the family of nations. The human citizen of the 20th and the 21st centuries, through education, international communication tools such as the internet and others became more knowledgeable about freedom and human rights. Many despotic regimes collapsed, others remained. The MENA region's governments and people so far failed to espouse this revolutionary change; instead they continually seek the rule by despots, whether enlightened or not, as in the case in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Iran, the Gulf Countries... this failure to emancipate from the old and archaic norms and rules is mainly caused by the uneducated and uncontrolled fusion between the spiritual values, dogmas and principles and the physical ones of power, wealth, sex and seclusion of freedom.

The statement by Aristotle is fully validated by the actual behavior of a majority of 365 million MENA's inhabitants. The ultimate abysmal tragedy, however, lies in the fact that the rulers and their followers believe that their moral duties dictate for them to impose their taboos and state of slavery upon those who have been introduced to the joy of peace and freedom. All tools and methods are, from their point of view, legal, moral and compulsory. They claim to be democratic in their behavior, promoters and disciples of democracy. Their claim is based on actual fabricated statistics reflecting popular consensus granted by an illiterate and misguided populace. The tribalistic emotional behavior allows no rooms for these who desire to be free, for those who dominate this unhealthy environment have so far failed to understand the true meaning of (a) living in a diverse society whereby all citizens are equal under just and equitable laws, while remaining different; (b) that human life is a gift, freely given by Creator himself, who alone has the right to dictate the norms and rules or recall them; (c) the creator granted freedom to individuals and no one can or may forbid them from enjoying it by taking it away from them; (d) men are fully responsible for his/her actions. Their only judge is the one who granted them those rights; (e) last man deserves to live with respect and dignity not in slavery, being fully responsible for his chosen destiny and future.

Literature review

Rulers and leaders in the MENA region, according to a close and critical observation by academic experts display a morbid attachment to power, for they are prepared to do anything, ethical or not, including selling out their followers and country, to retain their politically despotic power (Ali Khan, 2012).

In actuality those despots, under normal conditions, have governed for over 30 year terms in a specific power position, then they transmit their power to their family members, children and even wives. They ally themselves with Islamic powerful religious leaders trading privileges to sustain their authority. There are many examples such as Qaddafi of Libya, Mubarak of Egypt, Assad of Syria, Lebanese heads of the parliament or prime ministers, kings, princes, military dictators and others. They all strive to establish sole monopoly of power. Ali Khan commented stating: “whoever assumes power in the Arab region turns into ghastly and irrevocable dictators (Ali Khan, 2012). These “superhumans” employ the military and police to bolster their corrupt regimes. Often they foment religious fundamentalism and extremism to strive and spread fear and terror among their subjects (Habib, 2011). Montesquieu argues that despotism should be avoided at all costs for it cannot be restrained by law rather subjected to arbitrary whims of the despots. (SL. 3.2) Saddam Houssein, when asked about the role of law in governance, replied “the law is what I say it is”. In other countries such as Lebanon, politicians and their followers invented new form of democracy namely “consociational” democracy based on the rule of unanimity, something that has never succeeded in human history.

Despotism and religious “culturalism”

Researchers are divided on how much despotism can be caused by religious “culturalism”, meaning religious teachings, values, practices, taboos etc... Throughout human history, in polytheistic societies, the ruler was identified and worshiped as son of god e.g China, Greece, Rome...With Judaism and Christianity, although, the ruler was not divine by birth, but his power was divine and absolute as the case of Islamic rulers in medieval ages. (Curties by Mirengoff,2010)

Failing to separate between political and religious powers of the ruler Islam incarnated all powers in his hands as is the case of Al- Fakih or religious leader. Hence a new concept of democracy was created namely “theocratic democracy”. Since the religious leader is supreme in his powers, he, in the MENA region retained and practiced the power of despotism. This explains why a Muslim woman is forbidden, under penalty of death, to freely choose and marry a non-Muslim; or that non-Muslim citizens are not treated as equals enjoying the same legal, political economic and social human rights under the law. Religious leaders have the highest authority over the lives of the citizens whereby freedom of religion, marriage, association and others are not allowed. To keep control of the masses those religious leaders became sole interpreters of religious rituals and morality. Some even declare “holy wars” or promote the culture of violence based on conquest and terror. In this process they keep their followers poor and dependent upon them for survival on this earth and in the paradise where they would receive high rewards. The ultimate strategy is keep the masses busy with wars, violence and insecurity while blaming all evils on foreign enemies. It is the ultimate psychological dictatorship. Furthermore, they attempt to consolidate their power over the masses by compelling their followers to strictly practice religious rituals or face punishment. Even political parties are named as God’s parties, armies including battles, or wars. The citizen, in return, based on so many “attractive after death” promises full, consents to the despotic ruler. Those who blindly follow and obey the ruler are branded as “heroes” and faithful soldiers of god.

Jessy Ventura stated: “I love my country not my government.” In the MENA region people shout I love my “Zaim” (leader), my party and my religion. These people have not yet tasted freedom and having an identity. They are timid people who prefer the swampy calm of tyranny instead of the temptuous sea of liberty (Thomas Jefferson). The issue that imposes itself here is whether all men are created equal under the law. President George Washington, in his Farewell Address confirms that “all men are created equal”, then he adds when the “Know- Nothings” take control of power, equality dies.

G.K Chesterton went even further defining despotism as “a tired democracy” for citizens forfeit their rights to freedom. Tiffany Madison relied despotism to the disappearance of the rule of law and the reign of men’s whims. If one glances behind the governance curtain, one would discover the classic tactics of fear, manipulation and manufactured consensus imprisoning humans into prisons without physical bars.

Often leaders use despotism, concealed in the seductive form of religion or ideal.

In 1887 British historian John Acton wrote “power tends to corrupt and absolute power, corrupts absolutely”. When Montesquieu was asked about religion in Islamic state, he declared that it will always rule the region, because despotism is the only means to establish order in this region. (S.L. 24.3). The subjects are thus reduced to servility by consent, fear and intimidation (SL. 3.10) it is ironic to witness an individual, in that environment, forsake one’s father or family, and even kill any of them when ordered to the duty of “Jihad” (holy war). Religion is the ultimate tool used by despots to retain unlimited power and secure consent. Consequently the corrupt nature of despotism would be the result of the breeding ground by certain religious indoctrinations; especially when politics will become inherently subjected to religious approval on every issue.

This state of religious-cultural conflicts prompted Michael Curtis to advance the concept of “clash of civilization”.

The cult of Personality

The Arabs of the MENA region tend to worship their absolute rulers whose photos are plastered everywhere, whose names are pronounced with great, almost divine respect. They enjoy all titles of nobility and social discrimination beginning with “Sheikhs”, “Zaim”, “highness”, “most honored”, “god’s word” and so forth. Some human nations worship fake heroes and end up being controlled by ugly dictators (Ali Khan 2012). The result leads to government by tyranny whereby an individual holds supreme power and rules through his whim unfettered by accountability and the rule of law.

Children are saturated from early childhood by an irresponsible media and, controlled by government propaganda, glorifying the heroic and glorious acts of a specific leader who masters the art of threatening and spreading anxiety and fear in his subjects’ hearts.

Conclusion

Terms like democracy, despotism, tyranny, human rights and many others have been interchangeably used by individuals and groups to grab power and consolidate it. Born with a lust for power and control, man had to invent and use any available means that would increase and sustain his power.

The cost is not important, as long as the power is perpetrated by people who consent to it and who have lost the drive to fight back for their freedom and rights. It is quite evident that what Aristotles discovered 3000 years ago stands as a reality. The people of the MENA region consider their lives as meaningless without being led by a dictator or perhaps a soft form of slavery that is partially caused by religious fundamentalism and brain washing, poor education and abysmal knowledge of liberty. This research requires answers to many questions as follow-ups such as: for how long such popular apathy and hibernation would

last? What might be the means or tools to investigate and apply to generate dramatic changes in the grassroots and leadership itself? Who are the heroes who would initiate, pursue and sustain the change leading to emancipation and freedom?

Further, in depth research, is urgently needed to break away the chains of slavery and apathy for the inhabitants of the region.

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